

## 210hh- How To Let Go

By Ajahn Nyanamoli Thero

(A Summarised Transcription of a Hillside Hermitage Dhamma Talk)

**“Monks, whatever’s not yours: Let go of it. Your letting go of it will be for your long-term happiness & benefit. And what is not yours?”**

**“The eye isn’t yours: Let go of it. Your letting go of it will be for your long-term happiness & benefit. Forms are not yours... Eye-consciousness isn’t yours... Eye-contact isn’t yours... Whatever arises in dependence on eye-contact—experienced either as pleasure, as pain, or as neither-pleasure-nor-pain—that too isn’t yours: Let go of it. Your letting go of it will be for your long-term happiness & benefit.**

**“The ear isn’t yours: Let go of it...**

**“The nose isn’t yours: Let go of it...**

**“The tongue isn’t yours: Let go of it...**

**“The body’s not yours: Let go of it...**

**“The intellect’s not yours: Let go of it. Your letting go of it will be for your long-term happiness & benefit. Ideas are not yours... Intellect-consciousness isn’t yours... Intellect-contact isn’t yours... Whatever arises in dependence on intellect-contact—experienced either as pleasure, as pain, or as neither-pleasure-nor-pain—that too isn’t yours: Let go of it. Your letting go of it will be for your long-term happiness & benefit.**

**“Suppose a person were to gather or burn or do as he likes with the grass, twigs, branches, & leaves here in Jeta’s Grove. Would the thought occur to you, ‘It’s us that this person is gathering, burning, or doing with as he likes?’”**

**“No, lord. Why is that? Because those things are not our self nor do they pertain to our self.”**

**“In the same way, monks, the eye isn’t yours: Let go of it. Your letting go of it will be for your long-term happiness & benefit... The ear... The nose... The tongue... The body... The intellect’s not yours: Let go of it. Your letting go of it will be for your long-term happiness & benefit... Whatever arises in dependence on intellect-contact—experienced either as pleasure, as pain, or as neither-pleasure-nor-pain—that too isn’t yours: Let go of it. Your letting go of it will be for your long-term happiness & benefit.” - [Sn35.101](#)**

When you ask “How do I let go?”, do you ask that question when you are at the peak of happiness and when life is comfortable? Do you ask how to let go of that pleasure or excitement? No. That question is always asked when there’s something bothering you, when you’re overwhelmed, when something that you do not want is not going away, when you can’t help but keep revolving around something that’s unpleasant. That’s when you want to know how to let go.

However, you have to stop trying to get rid of that suffering because *letting go* entails developing wisdom in regard to the nature of not being able to hold things in the first place. If you were truly *holding* the loved one, they would not have passed, they would not have changed, you would not have been experiencing suffering, you would have been in control.

**“Bhikkhus, form is non-self. For if, bhikkhus, form were self, this form would not lead to affliction, and it would be possible to control form: ‘Let my form be thus; let my form not be thus.’ But because form is non-self, form leads to affliction, and it is not possible to control form: ‘Let my form be thus; let my form not be thus.’**

**“Feeling is non-self.... Perception is non-self.... Intentions are non-self.... Consciousness is non-self. For if, bhikkhus, consciousness were self, this consciousness would not lead to affliction, and it would be possible to control consciousness: ‘Let my consciousness be thus; let my consciousness not be thus.’ But because consciousness is non-self, consciousness leads to affliction, and it is not possible to control consciousness: ‘Let my consciousness be thus; let my consciousness not be thus.’” - [Sn22.59](#)**

When things are comfortable, people don't want to look at the nature of change or contemplate letting go. When things are happy and bright. They fully develop a belief that they are in control of what they own, what they possess, who they love, who they are. But then when things change, as you know they will but you have been ignoring that fact, NOW you want to let go. But really now you just want to not suffer the painful consequences which are the result of you holding on.

It's also not a question of never engaging with the world because things will change. It's about never losing perspective, in regard to that which is subject to change, which is everything around you, including yourself. In other words, letting go is not something you do. Letting go is understanding that you could not have held things in the first place.

**“...Here, Ānanda, a bhikkhu is practising in this way—‘It could not be and it could not be mine; it will not be, it will not be mine. Whatever there is, whatever exists—I abandon that’. In this way he obtains equanimity. He does not delight in that equanimity, he doesn't welcome it, doesn't keep holding on to it. For him, not delighting in that equanimity, not welcoming it, not holding onto it, consciousness is not dependent on it, he doesn't assume it. Ānanda, a bhikkhu who is without assumptions, is fully extinguished.” - [Mn106](#)**

Don't just reflect on letting go when there is discomfort or when there is pain, or when there is reminder of it, but do it at the peak of your happiness. When everything is fine, everything is going your way, be aware that it could have not been that way and it won't be that way. That reflection and remembrance can result in a slight uneasiness, but that is the gateway to that right perspective of recognising the true meaning of *anicca* that the Buddha spoke about. *Anicca* means “subject to change”, it doesn't mean “changing all the time”, it means “subject to change, against your will, outside of your scope of your control, you are subject to it”. Understanding *anicca*, understanding “being subject to change” means letting go, it means preventing yourself from assuming that you are holding on.

Often you will get given advice to just let go, but “just let go” is not a matter of choice. Even *holding* is not a matter of choice. It's the result of whether you have perspective in regard to what is subject to change or if you're ignoring that. If you're ignoring the nature that things are subject to change, that things are fundamentally not in your control, then you're “holding”, even if you don't think “I will hold this dearly”, you are already making something dear to you and you're holding it blindly. If you're not ignoring that things are subject to change, if you're consciously making an effort “Oh look, this is my dog, my pet I had it

my whole life, his life can end, my life can end, that's the most natural thing. But I don't want to think about it only when it happens, and now pretend that it will never happen, and just laugh it off and change the subject. Such an attitude means I am ignoring the basic, crude, obvious reality of things being subjected to change, that is against my will, and because of that I'm holding on to things, not because I look after the dog. Just because I feed it doesn't mean I'm attached. No. Only if I DO NOT have perspective in regard to the dog being subject to change, or myself being subject to change, then that's how I'm holding, that's how I'm attached". Likewise with family, possessions, wealth, health, things you take for granted. You take them for granted by ignoring that they are subject to change, because it's disconcerting to think about it. You think you can avoid it by ignoring it, but then you pay the price when they change and you're affected, and then you want to let go. But that's just the result of everything else you've been holding wrongly before.

"How do I let go?", should be reformulated as "How do I not lose perspective in regard to that which I hold dearly and is subject to change?"

Well, by making an effort to think about these things, rightly, even if you have to set some time aside everyday, like half an hour and just contemplate how things are subject to change. When you are doing such a contemplation, if you feel anxious, allow that feeling to manifest, because that is the feeling of the world that you're in. That anxiety is the result of recognising the true nature of things, and initially, that's not going to be pleasant to the mind which up to that point, has been making all the effort to ignore the nature of change. If somebody is asking the question, "How to let go?" That means at least to that extent, they have some sort of recognition of their responsibility in their own suffering.

The suffering you're experiencing on account of not letting go is the result of an underlying problem of ignoring that things are subject to change. You don't admit that to yourself enough, you never let that sink in deep enough, because it's felt unpleasantly. As simple as that. Therefore, you can start letting go by admitting these things to yourself, by contemplating it, and by enduring the unpleasantness of it when it arises. You can realise that you have a choice, you're either going to endure those mild anxieties and concerns on account of the realisation that, "Yes, things will change and I will not ignore this". Or you're going to pretend it's not there, and then be completely crushed, when things do change against your will. That's when you will be asking, "How do I let go?". You might even lose your mind with grief and so on. So don't wait for that to prompt you to think about letting go. Don't wait until it's too late.

You can let go or become detached by seeing that you could not have been attached to it in the first place, and the only way to see that is to contemplate that. It will prevent you from being attached the way you are. You cannot be attached to your pets or a loved one or possessions, if you don't forget they can be taken away at any given second, and the fact that that is a possibility, means they were never yours to begin with, no matter how long you have been attached to them, no matter how deeply you have loved them. It doesn't matter what you do, this is the ultimate context, "THIS is subject to change, it's against my will", that's *anicca*. Mindfulness of that context is worth developing because it leads to true freedom.

If you do make the effort and sustain the perspective that, "My dear pet can be taken away at any given time". That perspective will prevent you from becoming blindly, carelessly, obliviously attached to it. And when things change, there will not be as much of a shock to the system, because you know beforehand that it is truly out of your hands. So the grief will be seriously dampened, and if you've truly developed a full understanding of *anicca*, there will be no grief at all. Even for people who are not monks or who are not committed to this practice 24/7, it's still a useful thing to be aware of, the fact that things are subject to change. It's quite a useful superpower that you can develop in this life. It keeps you more resilient, more patient, more stable, more impermeable to disruptions, because sometimes things might change quickly into

one thing and then into another, from very pleasant, to intensely unpleasant, and you will still be able to sustain some sort of composure in regard to it, which most people would not. Which means your well being, your contentment will be less affected, even as an undevoted practitioner.

It's always useful to have that authentic recognition of "things are subject to change". But it needs to be done on that personal level. Usually when a person hears about *anicca*, it's often taken in this abstract sense, "Yes, everything is subject to change. Modern science has shown everything is constantly changing, etc". People tend to think about *anicca* in those completely impersonal terms, but that's not *anicca*. *Anicca* is finding that which is dear to you, and contemplating that to be subject to change, and then see how indifferent you're going to stay if you start thinking like that. If you work through that unease on account of contemplating the loss of that which is personally dear to you, that's where freedom from suffering can be found. The letting go that comes from understanding the nature of things is how you will not suffer even when your dearest family members, pets, friends, or whatever, change, die or leave. Your mind will not be affected. That doesn't mean that you will not perceive what has happened or not know the significance of an event, it just means you will not be as affected by it because you never lost perspective in regards to that which is inevitable- sickness, old age and death.

**"What do you think, bhikkhus: is matter permanent or impermanent?"**

**"Impermanent, Bhante".**

**"And whatever is impermanent: is that suffering or pleasure?"**

**"Suffering, Bhante".**

**"And whatever is impermanence, suffering, of the nature to change: is it appropriate to see that as 'This is mine, I am this, this is myself'?"**

**"No, Bhante".**

**"Is feeling...perception...determinations...consciousness permanent or impermanent?"**

**"Impermanent, Bhante".**

**"And whatever is impermanent: is that suffering or pleasure?"**

**"Suffering, Bhante".**

**"And whatever impermanent, suffering, of the nature to change: is it appropriate to see that as 'This is mine, I am this, this is myself'?"**

**"No, Bhante".**

**"Therefore, bhikkhus, whatever matter—past-future-present, here or external, coarse or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near—the essence of all matter should be seen with the right understanding in this way: 'This is not mine, I am not this, this is not myself'.**

**Whatever feeling...Whatever perception...Whatever determinations...Whatever consciousness—past-future-present, here or external, coarse or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near—the essence of all matter should be seen with the right understanding in this way: 'This is not mine, I am not this, this is not my self'.**

**Seeing in this way, bhikkhus, a noble disciple becomes disenchanted with matter, disenchanted with feeling, disenchanted with perception, disenchanted with determinations, disenchanted with**

consciousness. Disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate. Dispassionate, he is liberated. Liberated, there is the knowledge: 'Liberated'. He understands: 'Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what should be done has been done, there is no more of this.'" - [Sn22.59](#)

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